

**GENDER SENSITIZATION: SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION : GENDER SENSITIZATION: SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

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The discipline/ field/areas of Women's and Gender Studies and Gender and Development Studies are the most debated in the contemporary world. It has inter-linkages with society and culture that determines gender discourse from historical to contemporary time. However, feminists offer a critical inquiry of the intersections of culture and society from gender lens. Further, they sharply pointed out that how patriarchy regulates through culture and society and retains its multifaceted forms via gendered roles, socialization and so on. They also argue that the constructed notions of gender, gender binaries based on sex/gender/public/private dichotomy and so on need to be critically engaged. The society and culture changes as the civilized society move on to progress. This progress can be measured through indicators and goals. The State formulates and implements number of policies to achieve progress in the socio-economic areas. While, State deals with its complexities of its institutions, a number of categories play important roles. For instance, laws, media, labor, education, health sectors and etc. Still today, we witness huge violence, discrimination and subjugation against women, other gendered categories and all oppressed and marginal people.

After reading this Course, You should be able to:

- Build understanding of women's status and condition in our society;
- Raise the fundamental question that evolves around the core debates between each of the categories (laws, media, work and health etc.),
- Interrogates its role with society and culture; and
- Focus ways and means to sensitize society on gender issues.

Smita M. Patil

G. Uma

The image features a large, light gray watermark logo on the left side, consisting of a stylized 'U' and 'J' intertwined. To the right of the logo, the text 'UJiaguou' is written in a large, light gray font. Below this, the words 'THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY' are written in a smaller, light gray font. In the center of the page, the text 'BLOCK 1' and 'CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER' is displayed in a bold, black font.

**BLOCK 1**  
**CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER**

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# BLOCK 1 CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER

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## Introduction

This Block aims to introduce students/learner's concepts and basics related to the Course. Block 1 has four Units. The First Unit in this Block is titled as "Understanding Gender Related Concepts". It is important to know and be aware of the concepts related to any discipline. Like other disciplines, the discipline of gender has very important concepts. Once the learners get clarity about these concepts, it is easy for them to delve deep into the discipline and understand areas and issues related. The concepts dealt in Unit1 are gender, gender roles, masculinity, femininity, patriarchy, stereotyping, feminism, gender based violence, sexual harassment and empowerment. After getting clarity about these concepts, we are sure that learners develop interest to read further in this Block. The course Unit 2 is on "Gender and Sexualities and its aim is to make the learners acquire deep knowledge on sexuality. The Unit also explains how the social construction determines for the construction of sexuality and how sexuality structures day to day life everyday life. Unit 3 of this block is "Masculinities" which starts with defining masculinities. It also details the construction of masculinities in the society, the important role of masculinities in patriarchy, violence and sexualities and different forms of masculinities. Each form of masculinities and its impact on men, women and society are also described. The last and final Unit (Unit 4) in the Block is "Gender in Everyday Life" relates gender with our day to day life. After reading this Unit (Unit 4), the learners can relate their everyday experiences from gender perspectives and can try to find ways to reconstruct the same. We hope that the learners find interesting to read Block 1 and get awareness about the basics related to the discipline of Women's and Gender Studies and Gender and Development Studies.

Smita M.Patil G.Uma

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# UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING GENDER RELATED CONCEPTS

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## Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Sex and Gender
- 1.4 Gender Roles
- 1.5 Masculinity
- 1.6 Femininity
- 1.7 Public and Private Distinction
- 1.8 Patriarchy
- 1.9 Stereotyping
- 1.10 Feminism
- 1.11 Gender Based Violence
- 1.12 Sexual Harassment
- 1.13 Empowerment
- 1.14 Summing Up
- 1.15 Key words
- 1.16 References
- 1.17 Unit End Questions

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Each discipline has specific concepts. The learners need to learn and get clarity about these concepts for detailed study. The concepts dealt in this Unit are related to the Course ‘Gender Sensitization: Society and Culture’. These concepts are not only for this particular Course, but will help learners pursue further studies related to the discipline Women’s and Gender Studies and Gender and Development Studies. The Indira Gandhi National Open University offers postgraduate Programmes in Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS), Gender and Development Studies(GDS). There is an opportunity for the learners to pursue postgraduate programme in gender studies after getting familiarity with the concepts and issues through this Course. Along with explaining concepts, we have given some exercises and Case Studies to get more clarity. The learner may not get much explanation about these concepts in the rest of the Units. So, they can go through these concepts carefully to clear their concepts before they start reading other Units in the Course. The concepts explained in this Unit are sex and gender, gender roles, masculinity, femininity, patriarchy, gender- based violence and sexual harassment.

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## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this Unit, you would be able to

- Define the Concepts related to the Course; and
- Discuss and elaborate on the concepts related to them to everyday experiences.

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## 1.3 SEX AND GENDER

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What is sex? What is Gender? How to differentiate between these two concepts? Why is it important to distinguish both these concepts? Let us know about the concepts sex and gender. Sex is the biological differences between female and male, at a basic level. Human beings are either born as male or female for the most part, although there is a very small segment of babies that present a mixed anatomical distribution. Biological differences of female and male reflect in the chromosomes (Male chromosomes are XY and Female Chromosomes are XX), sex organs, hormones and other physical features. We need medical interventions in order to change the sex. When we think of biology and biological difference we also need to keep in mind that biology like other areas of knowledge is also not absolute or fixed. The instance or occurrence of intersex should make us aware of the dangers of biological essentialism.

Unlike sex, gender is socially constructed. Let us see how this social construction happens once the baby is born. Social structures such as family, society and other socio-cultural practices determine differences based on the sex of the child. The differences include clothing, behaviour, social role, position, identity and responsibility. In this way, gender is constructed and practiced.

Let us examine the terms sex and gender using examples and real life stories. When a new born baby arrives, the entire family celebrates with enthusiasm. Celebration differs based on sex differences of the new born baby. First the family and society determine clothes for the baby following a pattern of colour-coding. If it is a female child, they tend to buy pink clothes and toys related to cooking and dolls. At the same time, if the child is male, they buy blue clothes and toys like car and bike. The family and society also creates conditioned responses which are different for female and male children. The little girl is called a pretty little angel and the little boy is told to be brave and strong and not cry since crying is seen as a female attribute. In this way gender is constructed from the moment a child is born.

Gender is also constructed in different societies in different ways. They mainly focus on the expected roles to be played by the female and male. For imposing these roles on male and female child, the socialization process plays a significant role. The differences include productive and reproductive roles, paid and unpaid work, power relations and politics. We will discuss different roles (Gender roles) and power relations in detail in the next section. Gender roles and codes are questioned and existing roles and relations of men and women also challenged and changed. Society imposes certain roles on men and women. Social challenged and changed condition women to act only in certain ways and carry out roles i.e. productive and reproductive roles. For example, society imposes reproductive roles on women like caring and nurturing. Social condition of women to realize

that they are more suitable for reproductive roles rather than productive or community roles. The following case study gives you different pictures.

Late Kalpana Chawla wanted to be an Astronaut/ space scientist after completing her engineering degree in India. Due to her insistence, her parents allowed her to go to the United States (US) to become an Astronaut. Like her, Ms. Pavithra wants to be a pilot after completing her 12<sup>th</sup> Standard. She comes from lower income strata. Her father works as a bus conductor in the State Transport Corporation. She has to fight at two levels. She needs to find necessary financial resources to pursue her passion to become a pilot. Secondly, she has to convince her parents that she can also operate a flight like men. She does not want to study female centric profession.

The above real life case studies demonstrates how gender is constructed and how women can reverse their productive roles. Both the women struggled at multiple levels to convince family and other social structures to pursue their passion. They proved that productive roles are gender neutral. Both men and women can do all types of work. The expectations adhere to gender related behavior, roles, identity and professions are called gender stereotyping.

Let us now read some common stereotypes related to gender.

**Table 1.1 Common Gender Stereotypes**

Female	Male
Dependent	Independent
Weak	Powerful
Incompetent	Competent
Less important	More important
Emotional	Logical
Implementers	Decision makers
Housekeepers	Breadwinners
Supporters	Leaders
Fearful	Brave
Peace makers	Aggressive
Cautious	Adventurous
Soft Spoken	Outspoken

Reference: Prof. Vibhuti Patel, M.A programme SNTD Women's University The above mentioned gender stereotypes can be reversed and its suitability to all human beings (men and Women) depends upon their personality. You will read about it in detail in section 1.9 of this Unit.

### Activity 1

To understand the categories of Sex and Gender in more clear way, choose to visit few expectant mothers. Please ask them whether they want to have girl child or boy child. If they give preference for girl child, please ask them to list the reasons. If they want a male child, please request them to give reasons for the same. Match them with some given below or add to this list. Some of the possible reasons are given below:

Table 1.2

Sl.No	Girl Child	Boy Child
1.	Takes care of household work and other siblings	Support family economically
2.	Involved in reproductive works like caring and nurturing of elders	Less expenses for the marriage
3.	She is Goddess of Wealth and light of the family	Performs last rites for the parents
4.	Entire family can restrict her mobility. Decisions can be taken by the family on behalf of her	Heir of family Once he matures he becomes head of the family in patriarchal traditions.

### Activity 2

Answer the following statements that describe attributes related to sex/gender in Yes/No

- 1) Women are soft and men are tough
- 2) Women can conceive and men cannot
- 3) Women breastfeed their babies; Men feed milk in bottles
- 4) Childbearing is responsibility of mothers
- 5) Men take decisions
- 6) Men have moustaches and beards and women do not
- 7) Women can earn only 70% of what men earn
- 8) Women give birth and men don't
- 9) Women cry easily and men don't cry easily
- 10) Women menstruate every month
- 11) Boy's voice breaks in adolescence
- 12) Men are breadwinners/ head of the household.

**(Adopted from MGS-003 gender Analysis Block 1 Unit 1)**

Let us now read what we understand by gender roles.

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## 1.4 GENDER ROLES

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As we already read in the previous section, biological differences between sexes do not normally change unless there is a medical intervention. However, women and men perceive their own characteristics, roles and responsibilities in a particular way which does not flow out of sexual difference. It is assigned to them based on the perceived differences that is, it is a social construction. These roles differ in different societies based on the cultural system that is prevailing there e.g. patriarchy. Gender roles demand that activities assigned to men and women are based on these differential perceptions. The role differences similarly lead to selecting occupations. The term "Division of Labour" used in social sciences

and gender & women studies to indicate roles and responsibilities of men and women. So, gender roles are purely assigned and not based on their skills. Broadly speaking, men roles are related to economic activities and it is accounted in System of National Accounts (SNA) while women's roles are related to care and nurturing. These may not be taken into account in SNA. However, men may not perform domestic work.

According to Caroline Moser, Women are triply burdened in most of the developing countries. They perform three types of roles i.e Reproductive, Productive and Community Managing and Community Politics. Reproductive Roles include child bearing, child rearing, taking care of elders in the family and household work. Along with reproductive roles, women perform productive roles as secondary income earners. The economic activities performed by women are not accounted as economic activities. It is not included in System of National Accounts (SNA). The productive roles include part time economic activities, agriculture wage earners, taking care of milch animals and involving in informal sectors in urban areas. Apart from the above two, women are involved in community managing and community politics. It is considered as an extension of productive work. The activities and roles include provision and maintenance of community assets for collective consumption. They are also involved in health care and education of entire community. Community roles and politics performed by women are not paid. Unlike women, men do perform community politics and activities, but they get paid either as cash or kind. In many societies, women also carry out productive activities such as maintaining of small pieces of land/ agricultural plots for farming systems and animal husbandry. These tasks are often not considered as work and are often unpaid. Women may also perform many roles which attract wages in both the formal and informal economic sectors. But women's economically productive roles, in contrast to men's, are often undervalued or given relatively little recognition.

Gender roles and responsibilities vary among cultures and can change over time. For example, in India, unskilled labour is considered "women's work" while in Africa it is "men's work." In Europe and the United States, the contributions of men in domestic activities are becoming increasingly important and visible. Based on the roles and activities of men and women, the needs of the women and men differ. Identifying roles and needs and incorporating the same in plans and policies are important.

Before reading ahead, take up the following exercise to assess your understand of the concepts you read till now.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.

1) Explain the concepts sex and gender

.....  
.....  
.....

Let us now read about what is understood by masculinity and femininity.

## 1.5 MASCULINITY

The word Masculinity derives from Latin word ‘masculus (male person/male) and masculus (male). The word first used in 14<sup>th</sup> century to denote ‘male sex’. The word used more to refer the characteristics of men. The masculine characters are powerfulness, strength, force, manhood and manliness. The scholarly work on masculinities in 1960s and 1970s understood that the perceived and internalized attributes determine masculine identity. The cultural norms and values acquired through socialization process may influence the acquiring of masculine characteristics like aggression, ambition, analytical ability and assertiveness. The scholarly paper written by Raewyn Connell in 1979 (Connell 1983), discussed the social construction of bodies in the boys. Boys give importance to sports in the school years. They concentrate on development of physique, force and strength. He further elaborated that the drive towards developing masculine attributes among boys and men is an important part of the socialization process.

## 1.6 FEMININITY

It is culturally constructed collection of qualities, behaviours, appearance, attributes, features, characteristics, postures associated with women. It is not natural but is constructed and socially produced. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1949) wrote that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’. According to Judith Butler in the performativity theory, the repeated acts of performance create the illusion of femininity that becomes naturalised and constructs gender and feminine qualities/identities. The study on femininity concentrates on neo liberalism, culture, caste and other social structures and how these structures inhibit women’s freedom, opportunities, oppression and gender inequalities. For example, women are the driving force behind employment in European Union recently. Still there is gender gap in pay parity ([www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu); European Commission). The following table gives you the picture of gender inequality in India.

**Table 1.3 Gender inequalities- Some facts in India**

<b>Demographic Profile</b>				
<b>Population</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>
Total	Crore	84.6	102.9	121.1
Female	Crore	40.7	49.6	58.7
Male	Crore	43.9	53.2	62.3
<b>Sex Ratio</b>				
All India		926	933	943
Rural		938	946	949
Urban		893	900	929
<b>Life expectancy</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>2001-05</b>	<b>2006-10</b>	<b>2011-15</b>
Male		63.1	64.6	67.3
Female		65.6	67.7	69.6
<b>Literacy rate (7+ years)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>

All		52.21	64.84	72.99
Male		64.13	75.26	82.14
Female		39.29	53.67	65.46
<b>Higher Education</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>1950-51</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2013-14</b>
Total		N.A	11.16	21.1*
Male		N.A	13.5	22.3
Female		N.A	9.4	19.3

Reference: India Figures 2015, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

**\*provisional**

The evidence shown in Table 1.3 clearly shows that gender differences and inequalities persist at all levels. Majority of the world poor are women across the globe. Also, the evidence from Esther Boserup work on African Agriculture pattern in her book “Women’s Role in Economic Development” clearly brings out women’s involvement in food production. But ownership of land is with men in most of the societies according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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## 1.7 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISTINCTION

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The public private dichotomy forces women to be confined at home and restricts their movements. It further enforces women to perform domestic roles as care givers and nurtures. Public and Private dichotomy determine women’s material independence and access to education. Questioning of public and private has been central to women’s struggle for suffrage and equal participation in other spheres of life. Private relates to the activities within domestic realm and public comprises of activities situated outside of domestic sphere. Feminists consider this distinction hierarchical and patriarchal. This division leads to women’s subservient roles and status. The separation of women to private sphere because of her reproductive roles and locate men in the domains for economy, business, politics and law is in public sphere.

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## 1.8 PATRIARCHY

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Patriarchy is defined as rule of male/father. It is considered as an institution. The patriarchal institutions perpetuate domination of male and subordinates the female. The dominant power relations operate at different levels in the society and discriminate against female and girls at all levels. This discrimination not only leads to curtailing of opportunities and undermining of women’s agency, it may produce violence against women. Patriarchy further demarcates and insists that the private sphere is for women and the public sphere is for men. The public private dichotomy forces women to be confined at home and restricts their movements. It further enforces women to perform domestic roles as mother and wife. It also restricts women’s entry to politics and decision making level. These restrictions have important consequences for women’s material independence and access to education. Patriarchal norms are prevalent in social structures like family, society, politics, government, media and religion. In the patriarchal society, the inheritance of wealth passes to the son and it is called patrilineage. In the patriarchal tradition and patrilocal system, women are supposed to come to husband’s house and live there after marriage.

Let us now read about gender stereotyping in the following section.

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## 1.9 STEREOTYPING

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Gender stereotyping is nothing but reinforcing feminine and masculine qualities and attributes again and again. We have already seen masculine and feminine qualities and characters in sections 1.5 and 1.6. Gender stereotypes are beliefs which prescribe what men and women should and what they can do. It can be changed over period of time. But, changes are very slow. We can see few examples of gender stereotypes. Women are supposed to be caring and nurturing, kind, warm and they should be interested in children. The above said qualities are perceived for women in most of the societies. The qualities like intelligence are valued in both men and women. In the South Asian Societies, women should be presentable and dress properly and they must be proficient in household chores. With regard to profession, girls in Asian societies are encouraged to take up traditional professions like teaching or medicine predominantly, which are related to reproductive roles. i.e caring and nurturing. Other qualities prescribed for women as gender stereotypes are physical appearance. Society expects women to be thin. But there is no gender stereotyping on men about weight. Rudman and Fairchild study in the year 2004 showed that men who scored high in feminine knowledge test, declined to share their score. Due to gender stereotypes, the process of role reversals for men and women is slow and they are conflicts in the performance at different levels. Media especially print and visual media (Television) and cinema contribute to gender stereotyping. Most of the commercial cinemas and television serials portray men with masculine qualities. Women are mostly shown as dependent and they perform reproductive roles in popular cinema and television.

Read the following case study and write about your perception on gender stereotypes. **Case Study 1**, Saloni Malhotra is founder of company called “DesiCrew”. It is a socially motivated business process outsourcing (BPO) company. It provides Information Technology enabled services (ITes) to the rural area. The service delivery centres of the company operate in villages. Her company first train the youth in rural areas on computer operations. After that, trained youth will be appointed in the company. She perceived that the rural youth migrate to cities for a job. She wants to address the rural urban migration. Saloni is from Delhi. Her parents are doctors. Unlike her parents, she studied engineering. Her parents encouraged her to start a business to provide job in rural areas. They never pressurized her to get married or asked her to start a family life. Instead, they encouraged her to first establish her career. After stabilizing professional life, they asked her to consider family life. She put her energy to start her dream project “DesiCrew”. Saloni says “My desire to work in rural India was reconfirmed at the engineering college when one of my colleagues at the college, Pallavi from rural Maharashtra, one day proudly told me; she was going to study Computer Sciences. Later, I learnt that the poor girl had very little access to a computer. She just believed that studying Computer Sciences would help her get a well-paid job and the benefits which follow. Pallavi made me realize that she and I had one thing in common; we lack exposure in each other’s worlds. When we think of jobs for rural areas, we think of agriculture or handicrafts and ignore opportunities in high-tech areas. Young graduates from arts, engineering and commerce flock to cities to find jobs. Could we move the jobs to these people.....” Most employees in DesiCrew are females. Female employment opportunities in rural areas increase self esteem of girls. This encourages more parents to invest in girl’s education in rural area.



## Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.  
ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.
- 1) Give two examples of gender stereotyping in men and women.

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.....  
.....  
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.....

- 2) Define masculinity and femininity.

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.....  
.....  
.....

In the following sections you will read about few more concepts that would help you to understand in a broader perspective.

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### 1.10 FEMINISM

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Feminism is a movement. It challenged the causes for questioning the inferior status of women. The movement demands challenged the cause for equal status for men and women. It is also an ideology that works towards empowering women. It is a collective consciousness. Any individual or collective can strive for gender equality, gender equity and fight against oppression, injustice, exploitation and violence against women. The term 'feminist' is first used in French medical text in 1871. Feminism was process classified based on the movements that emerged in various historical periods. The period for first wave feminism was late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During that period, they fought for women's suffrage. The second wave feminist activities were in 1960s and 1970s. They concentrated on women's equal rights in family, at the workplace and on sexuality. In the beginning of 1990s, the third wave feminism started and it is continuing till now. Feminisms and feminists are categorized into liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, psycho analytical, post modern, eco feminism, feminisms of colour and so.

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### 1.11 GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

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Gender Based Violence (GBV) is 'the differential expressions of violence according to own sex, race, class, religion, sexuality, ability and other situating factors'. The 'battered women' movement of the 1970s which emerged as part of the second wave feminism contributed much to the emergence of the concept GBV. The United Nations (UN) decade for women and feminists were

instrumental in addressing the GBV issues at a global and national level. The four international women's conferences recognized violence in private and public sphere and recommended a broader policy outlook. This makes the national governments to bring necessary policies to address GBV.

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## 1.12 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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It is gender based discrimination at workplaces and also at public and private domain. For instance intimidating anyone through sexual advances and creating hostile environment in the work place are also sexual harassment. This includes showing sexually coloured objects, touching, teasing, demand for sexual favour, showing pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. Sexual harassment affects victims badly. A study conducted among 500 respondents and found that more than half had experienced sexual harassment at workplace in Singapore (Aware, 2008). Unit 16 of this course deals with Sexual Harassment at workplace.

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## 1.13 EMPOWERMENT

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Naila Kabeer defined "empowerment as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". She elaborates three dimensions of empowerment: (1) resources (conditions); (2) agency (process); and (3) achievement. In the process of empowerment, both women and men take control over their lives. They set their own agendas. They gain skills. They build self-confidence. They solve their problems and develop self-reliance. The following case study further explains the concept of empowerment.

### Case Study 2

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) was founded in 1990. The meaning of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan is "the Organization for the Power of Laborers and Farmers" in Hindi. The Organization is founded by three social activists. It located in one of the most backward areas in the state of Rajasthan, India. MKSS works for ensuring the proper implementation of people's rights among the poor. The members of MKSS are predominately from the low socio-economic strata. They belong to small and marginal farmers and landless labourers. The organization works for bringing transparency and accountability in the local administration. The activities of the organization include ensuring the payment of government-approved wages for workers. It mobilized people and conducted community and village levels meeting such as demonstrations and jansunvais. They organized meetings several years. A *jansunvai* is a participatory social audit in which government officials are brought face to face with citizens in a public gathering. The village people, especially daily wagers in government projects and applicants of antipoverty plan ask questions and verify official government's records. If they find discrepancies, they pose questions to the officials. The officials are bound to answer in the meeting itself. Such *jansunvais* often result in public exposure of the corrupt practices of officials. Giving people a voice to raise locally relevant issues and demand transparency in administration leads to their empowerment. The efforts of MKSS contributed significantly to the implementation of the Right to Information Act in Rajasthan. Its success has inspired people in other Indian states to demand the passage of a

similar Right to Information Act in their states. MKSS continues to work toward exposing corruption and increasing public accountability among government functionaries, and its work in fighting corruption for more than a decade has earned MKSS global recognition and support.

The above case study is adopted from the World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPOWERMENT/0,,contentMDK:20269087~menuPK:543261~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:486411,00.html>

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## 1.14 SUMMING UP

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In this Unit you read an important concepts related to the Course ‘Gender Sensitization: Society and Culture’. After reading these concepts you would be able to understand implications of gender in your day to day life. This understanding will also help you to learn about gender privileges of those who are powerful in our society and how vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society are deprived of their rights.

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## 1.15 KEY WORDS

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**Socialization:** It is a process of transforming a biological being into a social being. An infant is a biological entity at the time of birth. In the process of socialization the biological entity acquires gender traits of becoming boy or girl.

**Social Structure:** It includes social institutions (for example family, marriage and Kinship), Social practices (rites and rituals) and Social Processes (Socialization and Assimilation/ Modernization).

**System of National Accounts:** The System of National Accounts (SNA) consists of a coherent, consistent and integrated set of macroeconomic accounts, balance sheets and tables based on a set of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules.( ref: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India).

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## 1.17 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Define and discuss the concepts sex and gender with suitable examples
- 2) What are gender roles? Give a few examples in your daily life.

**Conceptualizing Gender**

- 3) What is patriarchy? Give a few examples
- 4) What is feminism? What are its various strands?
- 5) Explain the term empowerment with a suitable case study.
- 6) Examine Masculinity and Femininity prevalent in your family.



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## UNIT 2 GENDER AND SEXUALITIES

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### Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Sexuality- Concept
- 2.4 Source: The Social Construction of Sexuality
- 2.5 Sexuality- An Aspect of Life
- 2.6 Sexual Hierarchy
- 2.7 Same Sex Desires
- 2.8 Good Women and its Relationship with Sexuality
- 2.9 Sexual Pleasure and Empowerment
- 2.10 Summing Up
- 2.11 Key Words
- 2.12 References
- 2.13 Unit End Questions

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Any engagement with sexuality demands the understanding that sexuality is socially constructed. Notions of what is ‘natural’ and what is ‘unnatural’ often come into play while talking about sexuality and sexual desires. These ideas of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ are used to describe sexualities which are not ‘normative’.

How does sexuality relate to women’s empowerment? If indeed there are such connections, what has been the nature of engagement on the part of the women’s groups, in the current context in India, with issues of sexuality and issues of same sex desire?

Towards these goals, the issues addressed by this unit include: Challenging essentialism related to ideas and identities related to sexuality, how sexuality impact our lives and how marginalization based on sexuality leads to the concept of sexual hierarchy.

An effort has been made in this Unit to draw not only upon theoretical work undertaken on the above issues but also on interactions during workshops/life stories/fictionalized accounts. Questions have been asked around these to help us to deepen the engagement with the issues being discussed.

Let us look at the objectives of the Unit.

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### 2.2 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Know the social construction of sexuality;
- Enable learners to understand sexuality in a broad framework of patriarchy; and
- Discuss how does sexuality impact every aspect of our lives.

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## 2.3 SEXUALITY: CONCEPT

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A central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors (World Health Organization, Draft Working Definition, and October 2002).

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## 2.4 SOURCE: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY

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Read and reflect up on the following case study.

*My name is Anupama. I love food. I'd be hard pressed though to say what I liked the most. Ok if I must... my list of favourites is topped by gol guppas. For those of you who might not have had the pleasure of eating gol guppas, these are fried round balls of flour, filled with things like boiled chick peas, bits of boiled potato and spicy, flavoured water. (Apologies to those of you know and love gol guppas for this rather technical description of the thing we love.) And if you were to ask me what I hate most, its chicken biryani. Its one of the few things I don't like about my experiences in Hyderabad. It was here infact that I tasted chicken biryani or any kind of meat for that matter, two years ago, when I moved to Hyderabad from Ajmer.*

*As a child I was never allowed to eat non vegetarian food. My two brothers and my father ate meat, but my mother did not, and neither did she let me. even though we are Guptas... Kshatriyas, and eating meat is not taboo. My mother cooked meat at home but she did not eat it herself, nor, as I said, did she let me eat it. I've grow up feeling really angry and resentful about this.*

*When I got a job and moved to Lucknow (I was 25 at the time), one of the first things that I did was to start eating meat. I made a friend there and her name was Pushpa. She cooks amazing food and specially her Chicken Korma is out of this world. However, I realized I don't like Tandoori Chicken. It seems dry and tasteless to me. God knows how so many people crave for Tandoori Chicken. We normally eat at each others house. However, whenever she makes Tandoori Chicken, I go out and eat Idli, Dosa, brain curry, kebabs etc. In Lucknow, I discovered the joys of brain curry. I could not bring myself to eat it initially and it was a bit of an acquired taste, but now I love it. What would my mother think of that I wonder!*

Let us reflect upon the following:

- It is commonly held that taste in food is biological, natural, instinctual and fixed. Having read Anupama's story, would you agree or disagree? Why?
- **Perhaps in your answer you might agree that taste in food is strongly influenced by gender, caste, class, religion and region i.e. it is socially constructed.**

- At Home, Anupama could not eat meat because of her gender. Her brothers and father could because they are Guptas. They might not have been non-vegetarian if they were Brahmins. It was because Anupama shifted to Lucknow that she was exposed to different kinds of cuisine. And she could try out different kinds of food in Lucknow, because she could afford to do so.
- Anupama started eating meat at the age of 25. Also, at first Anupama was reluctant to even try brain curry, and then began loving it.

Therefore, we can say that Anupama

- i) Is diverse (what I love you might hate). There are many things that Anupama loves to eat. Puspha loves tandoori chicken however, Anupama does not.
- ii) Has positive and negative dimensions

Anupama loves food. It has been a source of enjoyment and discovery for her. We also know that as a girl Anupama was very upset that she was not allowed to eat meat. This was an act of discrimination that she resented. Anupama has experienced food in terms of both an enhancement and reduction of her sense of well being.

You might wonder why you are having to read and analyze Anupama's food habits in such detail. Or perhaps you have guessed already.

**Question:** Do you see any similarities between the dimensions that you have explored above with and sexuality?

It could well be argued that everything that can be said about taste in food, holds true for sexuality. Let's replace what we wrote above for 'taste in food' with 'sexuality' and see whether this is indeed so.

### Sexuality...

- Is strongly influenced by gender, caste, class, religion and region i.e. it is socially constructed
- Is not fixed, but changes and fluid
- Is diverse (what I might love you might hate)
- Has positive and negative dimensions

Let us read these attributes in details.

### Diversity

What shape our sexual desires, who we are attracted to and how we attain sexual satisfaction varies from individual to individual. Generally, it is assumed that attraction can only happen between men and women. However, since desire is fluid, attraction can happen between any two individuals. For instance, sexual attraction can happen between two women or between two men too.

The colors of desire are varied- it's not about who you are attracted to but what kind of desire you feel. Normally, when people hear the word 'Sex', they mean a sexual act between a man and a woman. This might be because this kind of sexual act is linked to lineage, reproduction and progeny, even though we know that sex is done not only for reproduction but for pleasure and desire.

### HOW WILL THE WORLD BE IF THERE WAS NO DIVERSITY

*Imagine that today the government has issued an order that all women should wear yellow sarees and all the men should wear white shirt and black pants. Tell me how would the world look? Boring! Actually, it is important to understand that we should not be scared of diversity but should accept it with objectivity.*

#### **Pain and pleasure:**

What are the terms which come to your mind when you think about the word sexuality? Love, desire, sexual pleasure, sexual orientation, shame, taboo, pain, sexual violence, rape, hesitation, rules, norms, societal sanctions etc.

From the above description, it is quite evident that sexuality has both positive and negative aspects. However, the positive aspects, like for example the instances of desire and pleasure are hardly talked about. Mostly, sexuality is talked about in the context of pain and violence. But it is important to acknowledge the positive aspects or the pleasure part of sexuality as well. Gayle Rubin says, “To some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic like more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation”.

#### **Fluid and changeable**

Like our food habits, sexuality is also fluid and can change. However, it might not be as changeable as food habits. Though not on a regular basis, but desires around sexuality- what I like, who I like can change sometime during life.

#### **Socially constructed**

What we eat, how we eat, who can eat what and why we eat are all socially constructed. Similarly with regard to sexuality also there are norms which will prove that sexuality is also socially constructed. In considering the argument that sexuality is socially constructed, it might be useful to consider here that who, how, when, whom and why we desire are all strongly subjected to social influences. There are well defined social norms related to all these dimensions of sexuality.

Following paragraphs explain how sexuality is socially constructed:

- **With whom:** In terms of who is meant to experience desire, once again the reproductive logic prevails. Often those who are outside of the reproductive age are either considered to be asexual or their sexual desires are considered to be unacceptable or inappropriate. Linked to the reproductive logic also is the view that denies people with disabilities the validity of their sexual desires. (very well shown in the movie Margaret with a straw) Desire is also only meant to be experienced between a man and a woman, preferably of the same caste, class and religion and in certain parts of the country of a different *gotra*.
- **When:** After marriage. Relationships outside the institution of marriage are not accepted and is not considered respectable.
- **Where:** Within the privacy of the bedroom.



### **Mumbai Police Arrested 40 Couples From Hotel Rooms For Public Indecency. Going Too Far?<sup>1</sup>**

*In a most bizarre incident, Mumbai Police conducted a raid in Madha Island and Aksa area and have arrested couples who were apparently spreading 'public indecency'.*

They reached the hotel rooms and pulled the couples out of that. Around 40 couples were arrested in this raid.

Details of the raid:

- People who were caught were made to call their parents and also charged Rs. 1200/- as fine. They suffered humiliation and violation of their human rights. The incident shows how state tries to control sexuality of its subjects.
- **What:** In terms of how sexual desire is to be experienced or expressed, it is heteronormative sex that is considered 'normal' and respectable. As it is associated with human reproduction. While it would be difficult to argue that the Victorian idea of 'sex only for reproduction' still holds true, never the less the reproductive logic persists, and grants high degree of legitimacy. In fact, in many contexts, the word 'sex' is used interchangeably with heteronormative sex'. In the Indian context, other sexual acts tend to be stigmatized.
- **Why:** The reason why sex is allowed is of course for reproduction and progeny. Sex for pleasure is not accepted.

Thus, these are some of the sexual norms that seek to govern who, how, when and why we experience sexual desires. Those who are perceived as breaking these norms are 'punished' and their rights violated. Gay men are harassed by the police, older people who are sexually active are ridiculed, younger people's sexuality is heavily policed, women who initiate sexual interactions are called sluts, lesbian women are forced to get married. Adherence to sexual norms is also sought to be ensured through processes of internalization of these norms.

An important means of maintaining these norms related to sexuality are processes of socialization which make our sexual behaviour and responses seem natural. Although our desires might be experienced as perhaps the most spontaneous and deepest expression of 'who we really are', sexuality is socially constructed.

#### **Difference between food and sexuality**

As you have seen that there are so many similarities between food and sexuality. However, there is a difference too. The easy way in which we can talk about differences in food is not possible when it comes to sexuality. If I don't like tandoori chicken and you like it, it might not create much differences between you and me. However, if my desire or my sexuality is very different from the norms as decided by the society, I might have to face severe consequences for it.

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## **2.5 SEXUALITY- AN ASPECT OF LIFE**

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World Health Organization (WHO) has given a detailed definition of sexuality. However, it needs to be reinstated that it is a central aspect of our lives. It is present in almost all the intricacies of our lives and it is important to address

those intricacies. We are presenting you some of the aspects of lives and you can see how sexuality is present in all these aspects.

**Education:** Drop-out of girls after 5<sup>th</sup> standard is a big issue in our country. The upper primary schools are located far from the village. In the context of education, we call it an issue of ‘Gender’. But is it seriously an issue of gender? If you talk to these girls’ parents they will tell you that since the schools are located far away from the villages, they are scared that ‘something’ might happen on their way to school. By something, they mean either sexual violence or some girls might explore their sexuality.

**Mobility:** Women are not allowed to go out at night. Mostly in women hostels, girls are not allowed to go out at night. In some universities, they have started the ‘Pinjra Tod’ Movement which calls the hostels as *pinjra* (prison). This also has linkages with sexuality because the authorities are scared that the girls might face sexual violence. The authorities will tell you that they are trying to protect the girls. But it is not merely a matter of protection. They are scared that girls might engage in consensual relationships or sex if they are allowed freedom.

**Doctor’s treatment:** Some parts of the body which are linked to reproduction and sexual health are called ‘private parts’ Girls are meant to feel shy about those parts. So whenever there are some health issues in those parts, girls feel shy to show them to doctors. Normally, such issues remain hidden.

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## 2.6 SEXUAL HIERARCHY

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In the mainstream society these are some of things about relationships that we always hear:

- Relationship should be between a man and a woman
- Relationships should be within the institution of marriage
- Relationships should be between a man and a woman of same caste, same religion and same class.

You must be thinking what’s wrong with these norms. It is important to understand that people who do not subscribe to these norms are penalized in their lives. They face varied forms of discrimination in the society, not accepted in and are at times might face death too. The following incident can be a case under study.

**Box No. 2.1**

**Same Sex Couple commits suicide<sup>2</sup>**

Monotosh Chakraborty | TNN | Jan 24, 2011

SONARPUR (South 24-Parganas): Two teenage girls committed suicide in a village in South 24-Parganas, apparently disillusioned about their future as a same-sex couple. Police found the bodies of 19-year-old Bobby Saha and 17-year-old Puja Mondal after breaking down a door of Bobby’s house in the Tripura Sundari area of Boral. The post-mortem report says they took poison together and lay down to die, clutching each other’s arms. “It appears that the two girls were in a relationship but they were depressed about the uncertainty of their future, which is why they committed suicide,” said police superintendent L N Meena. The victims’ families reportedly had a cordial

relationship despite facing criticism from neighbours for the girls’ “unusual behaviour”. “Bobby used to dress and behave like a man, whereas Puja was like any other girl.

Thus, the above incident shows that society does not approve any other kind of relationship except heterosexual relationship. In the earlier section, we saw how when men and women marry outside their respective castes, then they face severe harassment in the hands of the family and society.

Gayle Rubin talks about the ‘Charmed Circle’ with two conceptive circles representing acceptance and low acceptance of sexual acts behaviour. The inner circle represents sexual acts that are accepted and privileged while the “outer limits” represent non acceptable sexual behaviour that is viewed as abnormal and is often pathologized. But the boundaries are permeable and they change from culture to culture, market to market, generation to generation.

But a divergence is only acceptable under certain boundaries, e.g. homosexuality is acceptable but within the ‘inner circle’- it means it has to be monogamous, within home, within marriage, same generation etc.

People who are within the charmed circle are privileged and gain in terms of material realities. For instance, if a girl is married to a man of the same caste and religion, she will have respect in the community. Also people who are married according to societal norms get material benefits too. For instance, if I am married, then I can nominate my husband in my life insurance, or I can adopt a kid together, I can get a loan together, I can buy a house together. If I were a lesbian then I would not be able to buy a house together with my partner in India, or will not be allowed to nominate her in my insurance. But, this differs from context to context. In some countries where same sex marriage is legalized and the couples can nominate each other; however, one has to be in the charmed circle and not in the outside circle.

Coming back to the sexual hierarchy, it is clear that there is a fundamental relationship between this hierarchy and patriarchy. At the heart of the charmed circle is the heterosexual, monogamous married couple. This is precisely the unit that patriarchy requires. It is only within such a unit that the division of labour, resources and power required by patriarchy becomes possible. This also explains the severity of the punishment meted out to those who are seen to be violating the norms that maintain the sexual hierarchy. The incident of young women couple (in Box No 2. 1) feeling driven to commit suicide is an example of such punishment

Take the following exercise to assess your learning of last few sections.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.

1) Define sexuality

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 .....

2) What is Sexual Hierarchy?

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In the following section, read about same sex desires.

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## **2.7 SAME SEX DESIRES**

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Same sex relationships are those where men and women are in relationships with people of the same gender. For instance, if I am a woman and am attracted to a woman, or if I am a man attracted to another man, then I experience same sex desires. These relationships are also called homosexual relationships. These kinds of desires are considered ‘abnormal’ by society. Some of the human rights violence faced by people who desire people of same gender are:

- **Silence:** There is silence around these issues. One cannot talk to their closest friends about their desires because there is an assumption of heterosexuality among people
- **Family violence:** The violence around homosexuality starts within homes. Once parents find out about their desire, families pressurize people to abide by the norms. Several same sex desiring people have reported physical and mental violence from parents. In some places, there are instances of ‘corrective rape’ from family members.
- **Educational institution:** There is no mention of such relationships in text books. Friends taunt when they get to know about other’s sexuality.
- **Work place:** If you are in a workplace and your family is invited for a party, what if you are a same sex desiring person. Will you be able to present your partner as your family? You won’t be able to do that.

The only reason same sex desires are called abnormal is because they challenge patriarchy to a large extent. Think about a household which has two women as partners. Who will do the work outside of home, or who will take care of the household work. Either both will take care of both sides or one of them will do particular work. And since both of them are women, power is not unequal as in the case of a relationship between men and women. Same sex desires are also outside of reproductive logic. They do not have sex for procreation but for pleasure. Therefore, such relationships are stigmatized by society.

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## **2.8 GOOD WOMEN AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SEXUALITY**

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According to societal norms, there are two kinds of women- good women and bad women. It is usually expected that a woman will be a good daughter, good

wife, good mother, good sister etc. What is the definition of ‘good’ and ‘bad’? Why are we also so scared of becoming the ‘bad woman’?

What does a ‘good woman’ look like? She abides by all the norms of the society. She wears what is considered ‘appropriate’ by the society, she eats after feeding everyone, she listens to everyone, she cares for everyone without thinking about her own self. She has sex with her husband whenever her husband desires, she will never make the first move with regard to relationship or sex. On the other hand, a ‘bad woman’ according to society is one who does what she wants, she wears the clothes she wants, she eats when she is hungry. So let’s say, she has freedom to do whatever pleases her without taking other’s freedom. Normally it is assumed that since the ‘bad’ woman does whatever pleases her, she might be irresponsible. However, doing what one likes does not make her irresponsible. The norms of the good women are directly linked to sexuality. For instance, a ‘good’ woman will never say ‘no’ to her husband for sex, she will not talk to other men, she will wear what society insists that she wear. Therefore, these norms are directly linked to sexuality.

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## 2.9 SEXUAL PLEASURE AND EMPOWERMENT

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**There are complex reasons why many women, including feminists, have tended to be anxious around sexuality. Several of these reasons have been powerfully captured by *Carole Vance*.**

“Women - socialized by their mothers to keep their dresses down, their pants up, and their bodies away from stranger – come to experience their own sexual impulses as dangerous, causing them to venture outside the protected sphere.” Continuing with the theme of how the external control and internal processes of socialization come together to impact women’s sexuality, Dr. Vance writes that “The horrific effects of gender inequality may include not only brute violence, but the internalized control of women’s impulses, poisoning desire at its very root with self-doubt and anxiety.” Much of what Carole Vance writes applies to feminists in particular such as the following striking piece of analysis, “Sexuality also raises the fear of competition, as we recognize our own wishes to compete for attention and for loved objects. Whether women are lesbian or heterosexual, the competitors are other women, an unsisterly prospect.”<sup>3</sup>

“...(In a) workshop on gender and sexuality conducted by Nirantar with non formal education teachers in rural Rajasthan (a western state of India), we had a discussion on a scene in a documentary film in which a group of young boys talk amongst themselves about their sexual experiences with girls. One of boys comments on girls’ responses and says that even when girls say ‘no’ they actually mean ‘yes’. This was a comment which resonated strongly with the male teachers in the workshop. One of the women teachers however said that if a woman says ‘no’ to a man who makes a pass at her, it is common for him to dismiss this by saying ‘when a woman says no, she actually means yes.’ And if a woman says ‘yes’ to a man who has expressed interest in her, she will immediately be labeled a ‘loose’ woman. Women don’t have the space to say yes, even when they want to. This opens up the space for men who are rebuffed to invalidate women when they say no. The discussion concluded with the learning that women will have the right to say ‘no’ only if they have the right to say ‘yes’. <sup>4</sup> An important linkage between sexuality and empowerment is related to bodily integrity in

terms of women's ability to express their sexual desires and also to be able to say 'no' to unwanted sexual attention.

Finally we can say, Sexual Empowerment is

- The ability to think about one's own happiness, recognize the importance of sexual desires and to be able to express them
- Understanding the role of sexuality in why and how women are oppressed and its relation with oppression of women.
- Recognizing and striving to overcome barriers related to sexuality to the acquisition of rights
- Questioning judgmental attitudes towards each other and thereby strengthening collectives

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## 2.10 SUMMING UP

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In this unit you learnt what is distant nature of the categories such as sexuality and sex understood by sexuality and how it is different from sex. Sexuality is also socially constructed hierarchical in nature and controlled by patriarchy. Also other than hetero-normative types of sexual desires are not accepted by society. The unit ends with a discussion on sexual empowerment.

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## 2.11 KEY WORD

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**Diversity:** Varieties, range of different things.

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## 2.12 REFERENCES

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## 2.13 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Define sexuality
- 2) Explain how sexuality is socially constructed.
- 3) How does society differentiate between a good and a bad women.
- 4) What is sexual empowerment?

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## UNIT 3 MASCULINITIES

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### Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Why Talk of Masculinity?
- 3.4 Definition of Masculinity
- 3.5 Understanding Masculinity
- 3.6 Masculinity Construct
- 3.7 Forms of Masculinities
- 3.8 Patriarchy and Masculinity
- 3.9 Masculinity and Violence against Women
- 3.10 Sexuality and Masculinity
- 3.11 Role of Media
- 3.12 Summing Up
- 3.13 Key Words
- 3.14 References
- 3.15 Unit End Questions

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Women's movement first started with women as the leaders and the recipients of the outcomes of the struggle, both in the society and in the field of academics. The pace of change was found to be slow and it was looking at one side of a coin. It was realized that it is important to include men in the process of women's empowerment. For this it is imperative to understand masculinity and its effect on men and women to bring about change in gendered societal attitude and expectations in society.

In this unit we will start with a discussion on why a course on gender sensitization needs to be talked about masculinity and masculinities, how men and women are affected by these concepts. Then you will read about how masculinity is defined, its forms and construction, its relationship with patriarchy, violence and sexuality. The last section of the unit will focus on role of media followed by conclusion. Let us now go through the objectives of reading this Unit.

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### 3.2 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you would be able to:

- Define and explain construction of masculinities;
- Describe linkage between masculinities, patriarchy, violence and sexuality; and
- Discuss forms of masculinities and their impact on men and women in societies.

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### 3.3 WHY TALK OF MASCULINITY?

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Boys and men learn appropriate gender roles and behaviours that are in agreement with masculine expectations of the society in which they perform or live. Boys from their early childhood get messages about what it means to be a “boy”. You can understand how gendering takes place looking at the toys that are given to girls and boys to play with. Also, observe the games little boys and girls play, what roles do each of them take up. You find it to be a natural extension of their gender roles that they see unfolding in the family and outside of it in the society.

Let us take a look at what Kamala Bhasin has to say:

- Gender issues are not issues related to women only. Femininity does not exist in isolation from masculinity. Women are subordinated because men are able to dominate them because of societal hierarchy.
- Men and boys also suffer from stereotyping that emerge out of a patriarchal culture that make them the protector and provider of not only the women but the whole family. This patriarchal expectation needs to be interrogated. This needs to be understood in the context of how masculinities are constructed in a given society.
- Men are also subjected to hierarchal power relations that a certain kind of masculinity is being promoted. For example, gentle boys and men are sexually exploited by stronger and macho men/boys.
- It is important for men also to understand and address gender issues raised as they not only affect women but affect men too.
- Socio-economic changes in contemporary times have led to changes in gender roles and relations thus shaking the stereotypical patriarchal notions which are difficult for the men to accept. Erosion of male supremacy, power and privileges especially in education and employment has led to psychological and social problems leading to frustration and anger manifested as increase of violence on women, violent crimes, higher incidences of drug abuse and alcoholism.
- Women’s demand of equality, development and peace can not be attained without active support of the men. This would also free men of patriarchal shackles that constrict their wellbeing.
- To understand the issue of male violence against women, understanding constructions of masculinity is a must.

Bhasin (2004, pp. 2-5)

So, now you can see why it is essential to discuss masculinity and its variations to understand gender discrimination that girls and women face in society. Also, by changing societal and cultural scripts for masculinity and also the notion of femininity we can move towards a more gender just and gender sensitive society. Let’s now read how masculinity is defined.



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### 3.4 DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY

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The word masculinity is the noun form of ‘masculine’ which means having qualities or appearance traditionally associated with men, especially strength and aggressiveness. That is masculinity is primarily associated with traits and qualities which are socially defined and built. Thus, masculinity is social definition given to attributes of men and boys in a given society or culture and like gender, masculinity too is a ‘social construct’. That is, it is the society that prescribes how men and boys should dress, behave, act; what attitude and qualities they should possess and how they should be treated. So, masculinity is a set of socio-cultural expectations from the males which decrees how they should look, behave, earn etc. Masculinity differs from one particular society to another. For example, how a man in England is expected to portray his masculinity may differ from that of a man say from Egypt or in India. Thus, masculinity is also not static in relation to time and geography. And, since all men are also not alike in terms of their caste, class, ethnicity, race and even in sexual orientations, masculinity can not be a monolithic construct and therefore, has to be referred to as ‘masculinities’.

Masculinity is always local and subject to change. What does not change is the justification and naturalization of male power or masculine ideology.

Arthur Brittain ( cited in Kamla Bhasin 2004, pg. 9)

Let us now read about different aspects relating to masculinity and various forms of it.

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### 3.5 UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITY

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Masculinity cannot be understood without looking at the opposite construct and that is femininity. We can say that ‘a woman/girl’ is what ‘a man /boy’ is not and vice-versa; meaning masculine traits and qualities are opposites of feminine traits and qualities. As you have read in the above section, both masculinity and femininity are not biologically determined but are social constructs. Thus, gender identities are socio- culturally determined. Let’s look at some of the universally accepted masculine and feminine traits.

<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Feminine</b>
Rational	Emotional
Strong	Weak
Smart	Beautiful
Indifferent/Rough	Caring
Aggressive	Nurturing
Brave	Coy
Violent	Compassionate
Domineering	Tolerant
Independent	Dependent

When we translate the above masculine and feminine traits in societal relationship we find if men are expected to be aggressive, controlling and hot-tempered then women are expected to be submissive, meek, patient and docile. Thus, do you see that for one set of traits to function the other set of traits should be accepting of them? That is if one rules, then there should be someone to rule; and if one is superior, the other should be inferior.

What happens if the status quo of these masculine/feminine stereotypes is not adhered to? If for instance a person is treated very unkindly by society to the extent of being subjected to extreme form of violence like rape and murder. Suppose, if a boy has a tendency to cry or is gentle he is called 'sissy' and if a girl is aggressive or commanding she is derogatively labeled as 'manly'.

Understanding and challenging masculinities fundamentally means considering and questioning hierarchical power relations and systems in our society.

Experts have different opinion about the difference between men and women which are due to nature or nurture or some combination of both

From an early age, children get messages that shape their personality into boys and girls. Also, there are external sources called agents of gendering providing ideals or standard behaviour or roles expected of each member in a given society. Family and friends, educational institutions namely, schools, college and university, media, religion and other social, political and economic systems in society are all agents of gendering. They shape masculinity constructs for boys and men in their respective culture and society. Society expects different attitudes and behavioral response for any given situation or incident from the boys and the girls leading to gendered socialization.

Gendered socialization can be explained as the preference for boys and girls to be socialized differently. Boys are raised to follow male gender roles expectations and girls are supposed to conform to female roles, behaviour and actions appropriate for women.

Family generally socializes babies in a gendered manner without consciously following the culturally expected outcomes. For example, in most Indian homes boys are told not to cry, as girls do that. They are ridiculed if they want to play with a doll or apply a 'bindi' or wear a bangle like their mother or a sister. Even from the early childhood years boys are encouraged by the family to hit back and retaliate: that when in a fight they are taught to 'give it back' rather than being at the receiving end or losing out to the opponent. Also, winning is promoted as the goal of every situation, again instilling competition that should be clinched at all costs.

Masculinity is also shaped by the age, religion, caste, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality of an individual. Since, patriarchy perpetuates inequality and hierarchical social order, it considers men as superior and therefore, in a commanding and controlling position over women and men who are lower in position and status to them. In this sense, supremacy of masculinity is also endorsed by patriarchy as masculinity not only defines relationship between men and women but also between men too. It is also seen that women in public spaces also adopt masculine ways of working or leadership to have an upper hand over their subordinates in

order to show aggression and control like men. There is a perception that women cannot be successful until they masculinize the system of power. This suggests that we have to understand the concepts of masculinity and femininity. And, we should also be aware of the fact that these constructs are not biological but structures of consciousness which may be present in men and women.

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### 3.6 MASCULINITY CONSTRUCT

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It is a myth that masculinity is biological, that men possess masculine characteristics as a result of their physiology or it is a play of hormones. Then we will have to believe that all men are domineering, aggressive, short/hot tempered and violent and none of them can be different as they have the same biological makeup. But, we do find men who don't have many of these traits. Also, just think why a man who is domineering or violent with his wife is so timid and fearful in front of his boss. This goes to show that men depict typical masculine behaviour where they have a position of power and influence and bend over to so called 'feminine attributes' when they are in subordinate positions. Does it not prove that masculinity or for that matter femininity are not biological constructs but are governed by hierarchy and power dynamics that regulate relationships between men and women.

Masculinism is an approach that believes in and justifies male superiority and domination. It refers to observance and promotion of opinion, attitude, values, behavior and traits distinctive of men.

Androgyny is the state of having traits/appearance of both male and female genders.

The following section, you will read about different forms of masculinities.

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### 3.7 FORMS OF MASCULINITIES

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Connell (1995) discusses the following forms of masculinities:

- Hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity that is dominant, expresses a successful strategy for domination of women and men. Connell refers to it as a culturally authoritative form of masculinity that supports the dominance of men and the subordination of women demanding total submission. It is also constructed in relation to various other masculinities that are affected by class, caste, race and sexuality. Although it is the dominant form of masculinity but only a few men can actually meet the standards, necessitating emergence of multiple masculinities as discussed below.
- Subordinated Masculinity: There are gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men too. For example, gay men are subordinated to straight men by many practices/behaviour/attitudes. Gay men face cultural and at times economic exclusion too and are a target of street violence, workplace discrimination and personal boycotts. Such oppression makes homosexual masculinities come at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men. Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and

boys too are target of ridicule when abused as sissy, nerd, geek, mama's boy etc. as they portray an impression of feminine traits.

- **Complicit Masculinity:** The number of men who practice hegemonic pattern of masculinity (behaviour and attitude) in totality is always very small. But, majority of men gain from this hegemonic form as a sort of spill-over bonus. Here, there is no risk or fear of bearing the brunt of being in the forefront of hegemonic masculinity but these men get the advantage indirectly. Thus, they are complicit in this masculinity since it helps them to draw upon the advantage men in general gain from overall subordination of women in society.
- **Marginalized Masculinity:** Here is the interplay of gender with other structures such as class, race or caste that creates further hierarchical relationships amongst masculinities. It is a relational situation between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes, castes or ethnic groups.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

**Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this unit.

1) What is masculinity?

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2) List different forms of Masculinities.

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Let us now look at important linkage that is between patriarchy and masculinity.

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**3.8 PATRIARCHY AND MASCULINITY**

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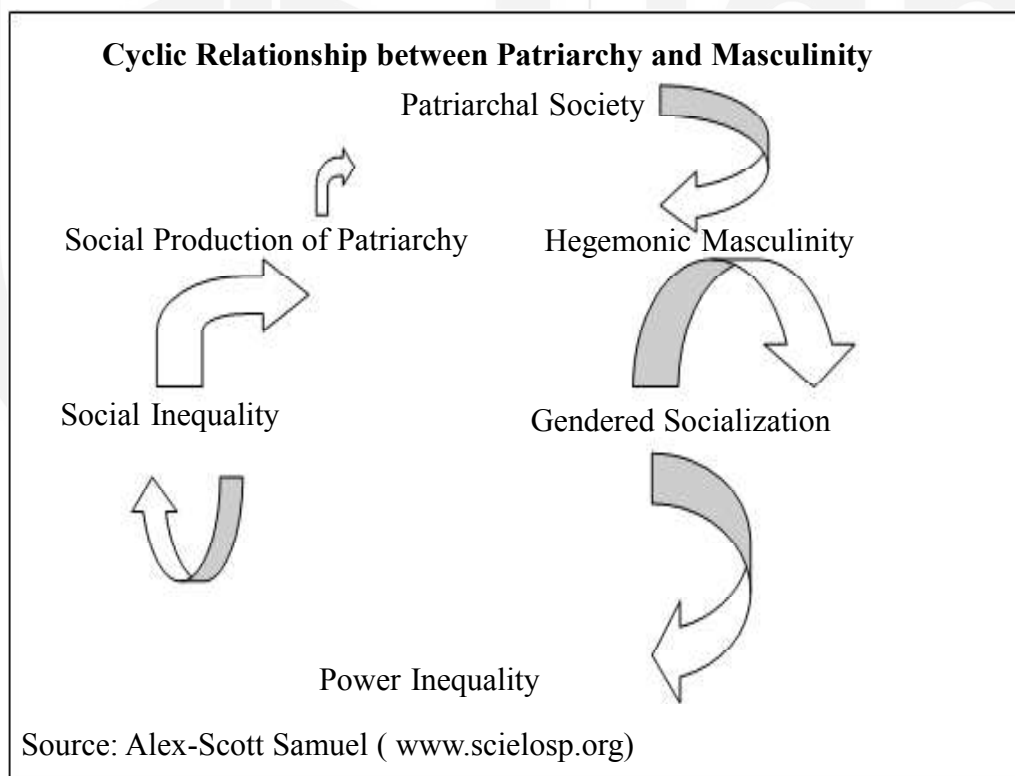
Patriarchy and masculinity are closely linked since both emerged in 1960's as a result of theorizing male dominance. Patriarchy, as you already read in the earlier Unit, is systematic domination by men over women and over other men. Also, patriarchy is predominantly carried out through societal institutions and structures while, masculinities are the range of alternative ways in which male gender relations are expressed. Also, it is mostly confined to actions/behavior of an individual or a small group of individuals. For example, we can say that the

family as an institution is patriarchal while the head of the family (supposedly a male) may be portraying hegemonic masculinity.

Very often patriarchy and masculinity are interchangeably used, though both are different in orientation and in terms of the concepts involved. But, many of the traditionally associated negative traits of masculinity like aggression and domination are functions of patriarchy. Patriarchy may represent the imbalanced expression of masculinity. In fact, the purpose of understanding masculinity is to free men from the shame of patriarchal autocracy and the resulting fear of lacking masculine experiences. Patriarchy prescribes social world of power and subordination in which men are forced to compete if they want to benefit from their inherited masculinities.

**When patriarchal notions are confronted, hegemonic masculinity shifts to preserve power.**

Men unequally share the fruits of patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity in India is influenced by class, caste and heterosexuality. It is constructed in relation to femininities and to various subordinated masculinities which are again associated with lower status in society and non-normative sexualities as in case of working class, dalits or homosexuals.



**Fig.1**

In the following section, read about linkage between masculinity and violence against women.

### **3.9 MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Men are expected to be in control of their women. Thus, it is no wonder that by marrying a woman, her husband (supposedly her owner), thinks that he has a

right to lose his temper or beat her up to keep her in control. Interestingly, many women do accept that there is nothing wrong if their husband uses violence on them for non-compliance of his demands. This is because of social conditioning of women.

Violence is mostly imposed by men on women to show their domination and supremacy. It is accepted in many societies as men who are violent with women get away with it. Violence keeps women subordinated and also under societal control.

Several national surveys have shown that domestic violence is highly prevalent in Indian society and as many as 50% of married women report it as a normal part of their married life. The more disturbing finding of these researches is that domestic violence is not private. It is known to the community but is ignored as it is considered as a family's private affair.

Research also shows that domestic violence plays an important role in gendering of boys and girls in the family. It also shapes gender identities that both boys and girls manifest in their own families and society at large as they learn from the pattern and behaviour of their parents. Boys feel it is appropriate for them to perpetuate the same violence that they had seen while growing up and girls internalize their acceptance and tolerance towards it. Our folklore too glorifies violent behaviour by a male beloved!

Thus, in patriarchal societies violence and aggression in men are justified as markers of masculinity. Men are expected to be the providers and protectors of women and children in the family. Thus, they consider it their duty to discipline their family members so as to guard the honour of the family/ community.

If we want to reduce violence, conflict and wars, if we want peace, if we want meaningful relationships and if we are really interested in sustainable development we will have to understand men and masculinity. Further, we will have to develop partnership between boys/ men and girls/women in order to achieve gender justice. Women can and may have to lead the movement but men must be made to join in large numbers.

Kamla Bhasin, 2004 pg. 5

Let us now look at how sexuality and masculinity are interlinked.

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### 3.10 SEXUALITY AND MASCULINITY

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You have learnt that masculinity represents aggression, domination and control. Then, it is quite natural that masculinity affects all interactions and relationships including sexual relations. Male sexuality, aggression and violence are connected in many ways. An example of this is language and expressions used by men. You will notice that all expletives used by men have sexual connotations and men use them so naturally for just about everything they do or not like to do or are angry about.

Men, in their mind, take sex as a controlling mechanism and women who refuse to respond or submit to sexual advances at times face terrible consequences. You must have also read in the newspapers about several incidents of '**acid attacks**' on young women who resist sexual advances by the perpetrator professing that if he cannot own them, nobody else should be able to do so.

Violent male sexuality is also responsible for sexual harassment (relates to molestation, stalking and sexual abuse etc.) that takes place in public spaces like roads, public transport, educational institutions and offices. Men commit rape to punish a woman. Look at the ‘Nirbhaya rape case’ where the woman was brutally raped as a punishment presumably for staying out at night with a man and her friend was also beaten up for being out with a woman. Thus, rape is the most gruesome consequence of link between masculinity, sexuality and violence. It has been widely used as a weapon in wars, holocausts and communal riots to punish men and women of affected communities or nations.

Violent masculinity make women pay for everybody’s sins, but especially for the cardinal sin of being born a female, writes Bhasin ( 2004, pg.32).

Violence against men by other men is also rampant and on the rise in contemporary societies. It is very damaging and self-perpetuating. There is evidence to show those boys who are violated and abused in their childhood are more likely to be violent and aggressive in their adulthood. Most of the men involved in crimes are found to have been subjected to childhood victimization and violence and this is how the vicious cycle continues. It is the notion of masculinity that push boys and men to be muscular and forceful. See how boys idealize Spiderman, Batman, Superman , Ironmen and other such iconic cartoon characters.

Along with the male’s greater aggression in other fields, goes his aggression in the sphere of sexuality. Males generally initiate sexual contact. The female’s sexuality is supposed to be in her receptiveness, extending it to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive.

Ann Oakley, 1985

Hence, it is important to understand how delinquency, crime and masculinity are linked and manifested in real life situations in the form of street fights, extortions, land and sex deals and other activities of underworld mafia.

Let us read how media reinforces motions of masculinity and also femininity.

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### 3.11 ROLE OF MEDIA

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Media is another gendering agent that reinforces the notion of both femininity and masculinity. Electronic media, especially, has a powerful influence in constructing notions of femininity and masculinity. It makes statements about what to wear, how to talk and how to behave in the family, community and the society at large. For example, media projects men as aggressive and macho. Do you know, there was an era of ‘angry young man’ cliché in the film industry? The hindi film ‘Mard’ depicts how a society deals with the gendering of boys and make them construct their hegemonic masculinity by showing aggression and adopting violent behavior. Another recent film ‘NH 10’ too makes a very poignant portrayal of hegemonic masculinity by perpetuating violence to save family honour not only on the sister and her fiancé, but also on those who support the so considered ‘erring girl’ and her beloved.

Our advertisements too reinforce gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Male aggression and power is appreciated and idealized for example, when a man rides a motorbike at high speed in slush, on mountains; or jumps from high

mountains and building to demonstration his toughness. The disclaimer that is run before the advertisement is hardly noticeable but just complete the legal formality but the otherwise rough display of power is in the face of the viewer. You must be knowing that there is channel that is dedicated to showing wrestling all the time and WWF is such a craze with young boys that they put up pin-ups and also bash up weaker boys emulating their WWF heroes. Look at the serials or soap operas that are aired on our TV channels. The older men are shown as providers and protectors while the young ones are seen indulging in violence, both with men and women in different forms and intensity. Watching these media images on TV, boys learn to accept aggressive masculinity as a norm.

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### 3.12 SUMMING UP

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We have read that masculinity is all about power over others. Those who submit are feminine and those who dominate are masculine. It is not to suggest that diversity between men and women should be removed. It is to say that not all men are same and not all women are alike. Rigid stereotyping needs to be challenged and broken as it harms both men and women, though in a different manner and at different levels. It is important to have diversity and opening of choices based on a person's ability and inclination and not based on his/her gendered socialization. Patriarchy creates hierarchies and inequalities that are harmful and devalues not only girls and women but to the family and society as a whole.

Thus, society's categorization of what is masculine is unrealistic as it may not capture what many men and women truly feel, but how they are expected to feel. So, there is a need to redefine masculinity for any progressive society.

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### 3.13 KEY WORDS

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**Acid Attacks:** Acid throwing is also called an acid attack, a vitriol attack or vitriolage. It is a form of violent assault defined as the act of throwing acid or a similarly corrosive substance onto the body of another "with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill".

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### 3.14 REFERENCES

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Bhasin Kamala (2004) **Exploring Masculinity**

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Messner, Michael, A. ( 2006) Men and Masculinities in Whitehead, Stephen, M (ed.) **Men and Masculinities Critical Concepts in Sociology** , London & New York: Routledge

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### 3.15 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Define masculinity?
- 2) Discuss why do we have multiple masculinities in society.
- 3) Write a note on relationship between masculinity and violence.
- 4) Explain how agents of gendering shape masculinities in a given society.



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## UNIT 4 GENDER IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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### Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Social Construction and Gender
  - 4.3.1 Sex and Gender
  - 4.3.2 Cultural Construction of Gender
  - 4.3.3 Gender Socialisation
  - 4.3.4 Construction of a Girl Child
- 4.4 Practice of Sex Segregation
- 4.5 Division of Labour and the Sphere of Work
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 References
- 4.9 Unit End Questions

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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As the title of the Unit indicates, our main aim is to develop familiarity with the meaning and various dimensions of social construction of gender through case studies and citing examples. The social construction of gender speaks about the relationship of gender with various institutions like caste, kinship, marriage and so on. From the perspective of gender and development, the process of gender construction can be explained in relation to the aspects of women's lives like work, decision-making, honour killing, and the notion of autonomy and freedom. Gender construction operates both at the macro and micro level and is very much embedded in the institutional arrangements of society. In this course, the gender construction will be explained from both sociological and development perspectives to understand the complex phenomenon of women's discrimination and inequality faced by women on account of their sex and socially constructed gender.

The Unit discusses the meaning of social construction of gender. It starts with explaining the meaning of social construction and understanding gender in relation to culture, sex segregation, work – force participation, decision-making, honour killing, and notion of autonomy and freedom. To begin with, the section on gender construction focuses broadly on culture and various structures like work, sex segregation and division of labour, which are perpetuating the existing gender divisions on the basis of sex difference. Similarly, in the section on work and the sexual division of labour, we discuss gender as an analytical tool to understand the inequalities which are reflected in ways of hierarchization of tasks, unequal distribution of resources, invisibility of women's work in agriculture and informal economy, and the sex segregation in spheres of work within the household.

This Unit has been adapted from Unit 3 of MGS001 of MA (Gender and Development Studies) programme.

Let us look at the objectives of reading this Unit.

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## 4.2 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the processes of gender construction in relation to culture and ordering of society;
- Examine the implications of gender construction in relation to development indicators like sex segregation, division of labour, decision-making, and socialization;
- Examine the relationship between gender and the structural arrangements of the society; and
- Analyze the necessary features of the universal position of gender construction.

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## 4.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND GENDER

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It is very often said that there is no such thing as a social reality. Further the question is asked! What are 'social constructions'? Rejecting intrinsically 'good' or 'bad' categories, these are described as social constructions. In other words, morality is the acquired vision of a society. How is the vision of a society or its social construction shaped? Is it shaped automatically? Is it culture - specific? Let us examine this process of social construction. Everyday we observe various objects, experience several events and related with various social interactions. These entire phenomena that are experienced individually help to develop an image of society or the world. Indeed we filter everything that happens to us everyday through the lens or screen of our understanding of our world and society. This everyday sense of the world or things forms the basis of social reality or construction of social reality (IGNOU material p: 6). In this sense, social construction is a social process in which both individuals and other social institutions and practices are intrinsically related. Social construction is also influenced, shaped and dominated by the interests of a particular group or class of people. In this sense, the culture, norms, ideologies, and values of the dominant group are used to justify and sustain a particular form of social construction. Hence social constructions through which we understand everyday life try to classify people on the basis of caste, class, religion, community, kinship, gender and so on. The classification of people is the consequence of social construction.

Let us read about the relationship between social construction and gender.

As we explore social construction of gender, we will focus on aspects such as the distinction between sex and gender as well as cultural construction of gender.

### 4.3.1 Sex and Gender

Understanding of the social construction of gender starts with explaining two concepts, i.e., gender and sex. These two terms bear different meanings as concepts. Gender refers to differences, hierarchies, rankings which exist between female and male. It explains cultural constructions associated with various roles that are played by women and men in the society. Further, gender analyzes the aspect of shaping women's behaviour according to the normative order of the society. Gender as a conceptual tool is used to analyze the structural relationships of inequality existing between women and men. This inequality gets reflected in

family and household, religion, caste, labour market, education, ecology, scientific establishments and political institutions. Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological differences between female and male which remain same across time and place. Gender can, therefore, be defined as a notion that offers a set of frameworks within which the social and ideological construction and representation of differences between the sexes are explained (IGNOU p: 7). Gender socialisation is a process through which children come to acquire the position of a social being by identifying themselves with definite gender roles and confirm to socially appropriate behaviours and attributes as females and males (Stanley and Wise, 2002). Women's identification with universally accepted mothering role, their subjective experiences as embodiment of love, care, support, and men's proximity with public domain characterised by impersonal and professional nature are the products of socio-cultural constructions femininity and masculinity. Social expectations from women as natural mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers not only exist at the patriarchal constructions, but also operate in the material environment of the society. Some feminist geographers have argued that space and gender are socially constructed and women's bodies, their activities, and mobility are limited to certain physical territories and structures. For instance, home is thought to be constructed through women's gender roles at the same time restricts women's access to freedom and mobility. For instance, middle-class women who work outside the household and travel at night to work in call centers often meet with sexual harassment, rape, and murder. This is a different discourse in the theory of feminisation of labour which shows how time-space of call center industries are also gendered in nature (Patel 2010). Sex connects the individual with her/his sex categorization and eventually restricts the individual with the social notion of femininity and masculinity. This process of gender socialisation is enabling the person to maintain her/his sex categorisation at the societal level.

#### 4.3.2 Cultural Construction of Gender

Gender is a complex phenomenon which is socially constructed and culturally determined. Culture can be described as a network of relationships that attaches meaning to the pattern of living of a particular community and group. Culture covers almost every facets of life including organization of production, structure of family and other institutions, ideologies and normative patterns of the society and nature of interactions or relations. Cultural construction of gender talks about the construction of masculinity and femininity in the context of socialization, i.e., the individual acquires the gendered bodies of being feminine or masculine in the course of social development. The construction of femininity and masculinity is also shaped by the institutions of family, economic, political, and religious organizations. Gender construction in relation to culture can be explained through the following points:

- **Gender construction supports the system of dominance:**

Gender categories are never neutral nor are they equal. Gender as a system of unequal relations between women and men gets manifested in spheres of work, production processes, access to resources and power, accepting the specific gender roles, and sex segregation in the labour market.

- **Gender construction vis-a-vis individual expression of gender:**

Feminist psycho-analysts assess that gender cannot be seen as an exclusively cultural, linguistic, and political construction. Therefore, we need to make a

distinction between prescriptive construction of gender and individual reflections of these constructions. Prescriptive construction of gender refers to those images which are socially, historically, culturally determined. For example, socializing a girl child to become a homemaker in future is deep rooted attitude in the society and manifested through dress code, appropriate conduct, and women's engagement in care giving or nurturing activities. Individual inflections are made by the interaction of an individual psyche with socio-political or cultural or historical norms. For example, if a boy/girl undergoes sex reassignment surgery, there may be couple of questions that need analysis such as: How do societies respond to variations in an individual's expression of gender identity? To what extent do members of societies internalize various gender roles and behaviours? This point brings us to the discussion of "doing gender" as a concept. Doing gender involves a complex set of socially governed perceptual, interactional and micro-political activities that cast a particular action as an expression of masculine or feminine nature (West and Zimmerman 2002). Therefore, gender is inherent to social situations, i.e., it is both 'product of' and 'produced by' social arrangements. The newborn only carries the sex identity that is imposed upon the individual by the society. Eventually, through continuous interaction with the parents or primary caretaker, the infant accomplishes gender identity. Doing gender is a process that legitimizes this fundamental gender division in the society.

#### Box No. 4.1

**The Case of Agnes: A Transsexual Boy** West and Zimmerman discuss the three analytical categories such as sex, sex category, and gender to understand the notion of doing gender. Garfinkel's case study of Agnes, a transsexual boy would be an apt example for understanding gender construction. Agnes adopted a female identity at the age of seventeen and underwent sex reassignment surgery some years later to understand gender construction. She possessed male genitals and required to project herself as a woman. She was obliged to learn the feminine features and analyze the conception of femininity within the socially structured situation. She did not possess the socially agreed attributes of the biological category to be classified as the female sex. More central to this argument is Kessler and McKenna's position, i.e., the biological criterion (sex) is hidden from the public perception and the individual continues to behave according to the socially agreed criteria of male or female. Male or female are the products of the gender attribution process and form an important part of gender accomplishment/activities. For example, if a child sees a picture of a person with suit and tie, immediately the child connects the picture with the image of a man. The sex category is socially situated and acquired by the individual through everyday interaction. People perceive the activity of an individual and deduce the category of sex. In this context, gender is understood to be the product of culture and society (refer West and Zimmerman, 2002).

The above-mentioned example shows how the categories of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and the gender identity can only be established in confirmation with the biological categorisation.

### 4.3.3 Gender Socialization

Socialization is the process by which the child transforms into a social being by adhering to social values, norms, and socially desired behaviour. Sex role

socialization is a means to women's oppression in the larger context. Stanley and Wise argue that sex role is often understood as gender role, i.e., expressing attributes of femininity or masculinity. Family as an institution supports in internalizing gender socialization and gender roles across cultures. Mother or primary caretaker responds differently to the child on the basis of sex categorization. The differential attitude includes touching, caring, and ideas about autonomy of boys and absence of autonomy of girls. The more parents display differential behaviour like exposing children to specific types of toys, exposing to various books where pictures identify the role of mother in kitchen, projection of gender roles and behaviour in televisions more the child will express gender stereotypes in daily life. Family and parents are seen primary agencies through which gender stereotypes are communicated to the children (Stanley and Sue Wise).

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this Unit.

1) What is Social Construction?

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2) What is Cultural Construction of gender?

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#### 4.3.4 Construction of a Girl Child

The construction of a girl child discusses the process of socialising a girl child in patrilineal and patriarchal societies like India. This section highlights constraints that a girl faces in the process of socializing herself as a female. Dube (2001) refers to the process of socialization as form of gender socialisation in which women and men are produced as gendered subjects. These gendered subjects are created through the medium of language, rituals, ceremonies and practices. In Indian families, the notion of gender difference begins with the sphere of reproduction – both mother and father share different roles in relation to procreation. It is culturally considered that the father is the provider of seed and mother symbolises with earth who receives the seed and nurture it. These role differences are culturally imagined, and continued through family, marriage, and kinship. Therefore, family and kinship are central to the understanding of gender socialization.

## Girl Child and the Natal Home

The construction of femininity is a continuous and complex process and is conveyed through language, proverbs, and rituals. The context of natal home for both married and unmarried daughters is widely used in the form of proverbs in the process of socialization. The desire for a boy child is explicit in the day-to-day conversation in forms of ‘speech’ ‘saying’. For instance, parents who are having only daughters are often perceived in a situation where the ‘future is black as they are not having any support’ (Dube 2001: 90). Similarly, the parental home is always referred to as a temporary shelter for girls. Therefore, girls grow up with the notion of having their own home in future after marriage. Proverbs and rituals give the realization of this inevitable fact of transferring the girl’s membership from her natal home to the home of her husband. Dube documented some of the proverbs spoken in various parts of India. In Odisha, there is a saying that equates ‘daughter with ghee’. The meaning of the proverb that is both are valuable; however both start to stink if not disposed of in right time. Similarly, there are festivals like Durga puja and Gauri puja which reiterate the idea of ‘home coming’ in the context of the goddess. These festivals are full of rituals which convey the message to young girls of their reality to leave their mother’s home and that they will be invited to the natal home in these festivals. The construction of a girl child begins with the feeling of getting temporary membership at the parental place, and the inevitability of learning some of the ideal feminine behaviour in due course.

The process of socialization of the girl child involves cultural construction of femininity at the pre-pubertal and post-pubertal phases. The importance of pre-pubertal purity amongst the girls has been given special recognition in rituals of various regions of India like Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka and other parts as well.

### Box No. 4.2

**Case Analysis** In Navaratri, the customs of worshiping and feeding virgin girls are widely practiced across India. On the eighth day of the festival, pre-pubertal girls are invited for worship and food. The girls represent Mother Goddess and they were worshiped and offered food along with other gifts as part of the ritual. Points can be inferred for a gender analysis include: i. In this festival the forms assigned to the girls are essentially feminine in nature, ii. The consciousness of femininity is constructed through their dressing style and from the gifts offered to them, and iii. a sharp distinction can be made between the phases of pre-puberty and post-puberty, and consequently, there is a sense of purity and sacredness associated with the pre-pubertal phase of women’s lives. The construction of femininity is symbolized in these rituals and the sense of feminine features is systematically built into the minds of the girl child.

The onset of puberty is the phase, which is marked by changes and transformation in a woman’s life. This phase is associated with several pubertal rituals, dietary prescriptions and seclusion of girls for certain days and these are practiced widely across India. These pubertal rituals are expressing the significance of maintaining sexual purity for girls in the context of marriage and motherhood.

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## 4.4 PRACTICE OF SEX SEGREGATION

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Sex segregation is mostly observed and studied within occupational and economic structures, which reflects women entering into a particular kind of profession in the regime of any economic reform. Purdah or the practice of female seclusion is widely followed across countries and communities and it prescribes obvious gender segregation in rural tasks and activities. In Bangladesh, the practice of female seclusion operated according to the inside/outside divide (Kabeer 1990). The author says that the poor women in Bangladesh are subjected to a twofold process of stereotyping. Poor women are perceived to be passive and vulnerable, yet they are regarded as the potential target groups for development. These images of women have been reinforced through cultural constructions like ‘women are always in need of male protection for their survival’. For example, the notion of the inside/outside divide has curtailed women’s freedom to move beyond the premises of the household. Therefore, they perform activities within the sphere of domesticity.

In the labour market, there is a wide division between men and women in terms of differential wages, access to MGNREGS job card, nature of work and the amount of work. Traditionally, women have been perceived to be dependent as far as employment is concerned. For instance, within the family women have access to resources through their male counterparts; similarly women in the labour market go through the male channels in accessing wage and other job opportunities. Majority of women are concentrated in the unorganized sector. In the case of unorganized sector, 95.79 per cent of females are concentrated in the sector as compared to 89.77 per cent of male workers. There is segregation on the basis of gender within the labour market and this division has led to rising socio-economic insecurities for women working in the unorganized and private sectors (Seth 2001). The author indicated that the states having low female status are into low paid and hazardous employment. Similarly, women’s participation in the field of political and technical employment is very low. In the agricultural sector, women have substantial contribution; however they are mostly employed as marginal workers. In agriculture, there is segregation with regard to nature of work assigned to women and men. In most of the states in India, men are engaged in ploughing and irrigation related activities and women have exclusively engaged in tasks like sowing, nurturing of plants, and harvesting. It is seen that men are mostly associated with marketing operations of the agricultural produce, and the control of resource and surplus is considered to be the domain of men. Further, the role of women as primary caretaker made them negotiating with flexible and temporary jobs. As rightly pointed out, married women are always been considered as ‘reserve army’ which could be kept outside the labour market to be used during labour crises. Women have no formal contract as employees and are exposed to poor safety conditions and other vulnerabilities. Women as the workforce are of primary importance to the global economy and at the same time devoid of health and labour protection.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the questions.  
ii) Compare your answer with the Course material of this Unit.

1) How does sex segregation help to understand gender construction?

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2) What is understood by cultural construction of girl child?

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Let us read about what is understood by division of labour and the sphere of work.

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**4.5 DIVISION OF LABOUR AND THE SPHERE OF WORK**

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Gender relations are situated within the sexual division of labour and often create gender conflict. For instance, African agriculture is often perceived to be female system of farming. Within agriculture, the sphere of work is divided along gender lines. In Africa, the separation of the sphere of work between women and men implies the social exchange of labour between women and men. However, women’s sphere of work is surrounded by a complex set of claims and obligations. As Whitehead argued, two different kinds of social environment govern women’s economic activity in Africa. In women’s sphere of work, they have access to resources like land and the produce was shared with her children, husband, and other family members. Women have the obligation to work for their husbands and other family members, but there is no direct return/benefit receive by women in exchange of her labour. Women’s labour is constructed within the social environment of rights and obligations. Women’s work in the husband’s field is conceptualized under her general rights to welfare and maintenance as a household member.

Boserup’s book on women’s role in economic development was widely acknowledged within the field of women’s work.



Boserup discussed two systems of farming such as ‘female system’ vis-à-vis ‘male system’ of farming practised in countries of Africa and Asia, respectively. African farming exhibits a trend towards female system of farming characterised by family labour with higher percentage of female labour force participation, women accessing freedom and mobility, high bride price, son preference was less featured. The plough culture of Asian farming exhibits a trend towards male system of farming characterised by higher participation of male waged labour indicating women’s exclusion from farming. This practice of women’s seclusion from agriculture was reproduced through social norms such as women’s lack of inheritance right, dowry, system of son preference, and increasing rate of female mortality resulting into adverse sex ratio in the population (refer Kabeer, 2010).

The model explicitly discussed the notion of sexual division of labour in the context agriculture. To begin with, the author describes African farming as ‘female system of farming’ that clearly relegated to periphery in the wake of modernization and economic development. As Whitehead argued to show how agriculture is gendered in nature— the cash crop sector is managed by the men folk and the food crop sector is organized through women’s labour. This model emphasized the feminine nature of subsistence farming and women’s inability to participate in the modern farming sector in the African context. However, this framework was criticized on the ground that it completely neglected women’s contribution in modern food production. Whitehead argues, to meet the increasing cash needs of the African households, women have significantly contributed in family labour for cash cropping or increased trading.

Work is often understood to be physical and mental labour. Hochschild (cited by Redfern and Aune 2010) coined the term ‘emotional labour’ that reflects a particular kind of work associated with care and nurture. Emotional labour is associated with female occupation both in the domain of family and work sphere; therefore needs to be accepted as a particular forms of skill to be paid in future. Within family, women’s unpaid work is described as a “labour of love” that has been unremunerated, however, accountable under patriarchy.

#### Box No. 4.4

##### **Labour of Love Have you many children?**

The doctor asked. God has not been kind to me. Of fifteen born, only nine live. Does your wife work? No, she stays at home. I see, how does she spend her day? Doctor asked. Well, she gets up at four in the morning, fetches water, and wood, makes the fire and cooks breakfast. Then she goes to the river and washes clothes. After that she goes to town to get corn ground and buys what we need in the market. Then she cooks the midday meal. You come home at midday? No no, she brings the meal to me in the fields— about three kilometres from home. And after that? Well, she takes care of the hens and pigs, and of course she looks after the children all day. .... then she prepares the supper so it is ready when I come home. Does she go to bed after supper? No, I do. She has things to do around the house until about nine o’clock. But of course you say wife doesn’t work? Of course she doesn’t work. I told you, she stays at home. (source: ILO ,1977, quoted by Mitter, 2002)

This above-mentioned extract describes the nature of labour associated with females and considered not only to be feminine in nature but also invisible and unremunerated.

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## 4.6 SUMMING UP

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The Unit discusses the concept of gender while making the distinction between biological sex and social gender. The Unit contributes to the understanding of gender both as social and cultural constructions. Gender as a social division has impacted women and men differentially in the contexts of socialization, work, sex segregation, and division of labour.

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## 4.7 KEY WORDS

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**Kinship:** Kinship is a relationship between individuals who share a genealogical origin, through biological, cultural, or historical descent.

**Honour Killing:** Honour killing is the killing of a member of a family or social group by other members, due to the belief of the perpetrators (and potentially the wider community) that the victim has brought dishonour upon the family or community. Honour killings are directed mostly against women and girls.

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## 4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Is gender socially constructed? Substantiate your arguments with suitable examples.
- 2) Explain gender as a product of society and culture.
- 3) How do aspects like division of labour and sex segregation explain the notion of femininity and masculinity?



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